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# Course paper

## Theme:Received Pronunciation.

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**Contents**

## Introduction

Pronounciation refers to the ability to use the correct stress, Rhythm and intonation of a word in a spoken language. A word can he spoken in different ways by various individuals or groups, depending on many factors, such as: the area in which they grew up, the area in which they now live, if they have a speech or voice disorder, their ethnic group, their social class, or their education. Reith sought a style or quality of' English that would not be laughedat in any part of the country. It was generally agreed that the most appropriate medium was the accent which Jones at that time reffered to as Public School Pronounciation and shortly afterwards began to call Received Pronounciation.The committee's recommendations on the pronounciation of individual words were mandatory for announcers and newsreaders.Pronounciation of individual words agreed by the commitee were not written in IPA symbols but in a respelling system that would be more readily intelligible to the BBC's staff. Early recommendations that had no longterm effect include allies and mishap stressed on the second syllable, immanent as"immaynent", to avoid confusion with immenent, pejorative as "pee-jorativ", and quandary as "kwondairy". The membership of the commitee grew over the years, until it was over 20 strong. Short form RP, a term in phonetics, and language teaching for the accent generally associated with educated British English and used as a pronounciation model for teaching it to foreign learners. This accent has been ref fered to technically as: Received Standard English and Public School English by Henry Cecill, Public School Pronounciation by Daniel Jones[l:21] prior to using the term itself. Since its intial description by Jones in the English Pronouncing dictionary in 1917, it has probably become the most described and discussed accent on earth.

Riceived pronounciation is often taken to have existed for a relatively long time, evolving from a prestigious accent well established in England by the 17c, when comparisons began to be made between the speech of the court and the nobility in London and that of their peers from the provinces. John Aubrey provides a hearsay report that Sir Walter Raleigh had a Devon accent; Samuel Johnson in the 18c is on

record as speaking with a Staffordshire acccnt. Although there was an increasingly homogeneous and fashinable style of speech in the capitalin the 18-19c, little is known about it. It probably served in part at least as a model for the middel classes and may have been common at such ancient public schools as Eton, Harrow, Rugby, and Winchester, but there is no evidence that a uniform accent was used or promoted in these schools untill the later 19c. However,by beginning of the 20c, it was well established, and in 1917, at the height of the First World War, Jones defined his model for English as that 'most usually heard in everyday speech in the families of Southern english persons whose menfolk have been educated at the great public boarding-school', and called it public School Pronounciation. The heyday of Empire, approximately 1890-1940, was also the high point of RP, which has been described by such terms as 'patrician' and 'proconsular'. Its possession wasa criterion for the selection of young men as potential officers during the First World War and it has been the accent favoured for recruits to the Foreign Office and other services representing the British nation. Newcomers to the British establishment have tended to ensure that their children acquire RP by sending them to the 'right' schools or, especially in the past in the case of girls, to elocution teachers. In these schools the accent has never been overtly taught, but appears to have been indirectly encouraged and often promoted through peer pressure that has included mockery of any other form of speech. It has been the voice of nation announcers and presenters on the BBC since its founding in the 1920s, but in the 1970s-80s there has been a move towards modified regional accents among announcers and presenters, and towards distinct regional accents among presenters on popular radio channels and meteorologists and sports commentators on television.

The terms Recieved Pronounciation and RP are not widely known outside the immediate circle of English-language professionals, but the form that they refer to is widely known as the spoken embodiment of a variety or varieties known as the King's English, the Queen's English, and Public School English. It is often informally referred to by British middle class as a BBC accent or a public school accent and by the working class as talking proper or talking posh. In England, it is also often to simply as

Standard English. Its “advanced” form is sometimes called la-di-dah or a cut-glass accent, especially if used by people judged as not really ‘from the top drawer’. RP has been described by many of its users and admirers in the UK and elsewhere as the best pronounciation for British English, for the countries influenced by British English , or for all users of English everywhere. Americans do not normally sudscribe to this view, but many of them admire RP as the representative accent of educated British English while some associate it with the theatre and, in men, with effeminacy.

Many British people dislike Received Pronounciation, usually arguing that it is a mark of privilege and of social domination by the English. It has, however, a considerable gravitational pull throughout the UK, wih the result that many middle- and lower middle-class people, especially in England, speak with accents more or less adapted towads it. These accents are therefore known among phoneticians as modified regional accents and modified RP. Comparable accents in Australia, Ireland, New Zerland, Scotland, South Africa, and elsewhere are often referred to as Nea-RP. It has always been a minority accent, unlikely ever to have been spoken by more than 3-4 % of British population. British phoneticians and linguists have often described it as a ‘regionless[5] accent in the UK and especially in England, in that it is not possible to tell which part of the country an RP speaker comes from; it is never, however, described as a 'classless' accent, because it identifies the speaker as a member of the middle or upper classes. Because it is class-related, it is socially and politically controversial and can lead to embarrassment when discusscd.

**Generalities and characteristics.**

(1) The description of RP in A. C. Gimson, An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English ( Edward Arnold, 3rd edition, 1980)[3:18], is widely regarded as standard. Its 4th edition (1990) has been revised by Susan Ramsaran. (2) RP is often used as a reference norm for the description of other varieties of English. An idealized representation has been available for this and other purposes for at least 20 years, with minor differences in the house styles of such publishers as Oxford University Press and Longman. A comparison between RP and ‘GenAm’ (General American) is a key element of John C. Wells's Longman Pronunciation Dictionary (1990),[6:21]. (3) RP

differs little from other accents of English in the pronunciation of consonants, which are 24 in number. It is a non-rhotic accent that includes the linking/intrusive *fxf* (widely noted in such phrases as law/r and order), which is not however taught as part of the EFL/ESL pronunciation model. (4) Wells (above) lists the following 22 basic values of RP vowels: /I/ as in kit, bid, hymn, intend, basic; /e/ as in dress, bed; /ae/ as in trap, bad; *Id!* as in lot, odd, wash; /a/ as in strut, bud, love; /u/ as in foot, good, put; /in/ as in fleece, sea, machine; /el/ as in face, day, steak; /al/ as in price, high, try; *hi!* as in choice, boy; /uI / as in goose, two, blue; *ioul* as in goat, show, no; /au/ as in mouth, now; /io/ as in near, here, serious; /es/ as in square, fair, various; /cTJ/ as in start, father; /dG/ as in thought, law, north, war; /Uo/ as in cure, poor, jury; /3G/ as in nurse, stir; /i/ as in happy, radiation, glorious; *h/* as in the first vowel of about and the\ last of comma; /u/ in influence, situation, annual.

**Current situation**

Although RP continues to be socially pre-eminent in Britain, and especially Lngland, it has in recent years become less monolithic both phonetically and socially. Phoneticians recognize several varieties and also a generation gap. In the introduction to the 14th edition of the EPD (1977), Gimson noted of RP that its 'regional base remains valid and it continues to have wide intelligibility throughout Britain ... has been a certain dilution of the original concept of RP, a number of local variants formerly excluded by the definition having now to be admitted as of common and acceptable usage. Such an extended scope of usage is difficult to define.' He retained the name, however, because of its 'currency in books on present-day English'. Even so, the observations of the phonetician David Abercrombie in 1951 still largely apply:

This R.P. stands in strong contrast to all the other ways of pronouncing Standard English put together. In fact, English people are divided, by the way they talk, into three groups; first, R.P. speakers of Standard English—those [regarded as being] without an accent; second, non- R.P. speakers of Standard English—those with an accent; and third, dialect speakers. I believe this to be a situation which is not paralleled in any other country anywhere ('R.P. and Local Accent', in Studies in Linguistics and Phonetics, 1965).

In the 15th edition of the EPD (1997), Peter Roach [10:83] and James Hartman have replaced ‘the archaic name Received Pronunciation’ with BBC English, to contrast with Network English for AmL. The system remains, however, essentially the same.

**RP and EFL**

Because most British teachers of English have spoken with RP or modified-RP accents, overseas learners have until recently tended to assume that it is the majority accent of BrE. It retains its position as the preferred target for COMMONWEALTH ESL learners, although in countries such as India and Singapore local pronunciations with a degree of prestige have emerged and may in due course replace it or operate alongside it. In EFL, it competes more and more with equivalent forms of AmE, but is strongly buttressed by the investment in RP made by British ELT publishers, especially in learners' dictionaries. It is generally selected as a matter of course as the reference norm lor discussing spoken BrE (and often other varieties of English), as well as for such activities as automatic speech synthesis, but since most British people do not speak or even know RP as a coherent system, general statements about BrE keyed to Received Pronunciation can often be misleading and confusing.

**ENGLISH PRONOUNCING DICTIONARY:** short form EPD. A work of reference by the phonetician Daniel JONES[4:13], based on his Phonetic Dictionary of the English Language (1913). The EPD was published during the First World War by J. M. Dent (1917); it is one of the most influential ELT books ever published, is 6 widely regarded as an institution, and is closely associated with the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics of U. College London, where Jones worked and where its revision was maintained for many years first by A. C. Gimson, then Susan Ramsaran. Their revisions appeared in 1924 (2nd edition: with supplement), 1926 (3rd: with revised introduction), 1937 (4th: enlarged and reset), 1940 (5th), 1944 (6th), 1945 (7th: with supplement), 1947 (8th), 1948 (9th), 1949 (10th), 1956 (11th: enlarged and reset), 1963 (12th: with supplement and phonetic glossary; with corrections and revisions by Gimson in the 1964 reprint), 1967 (13th: enlarged and reset), 1977 (14th: reset, with revisions and a supplement by Ramsaran in 1988). Cambridge University acquired the

rights from Dent and in 1997 brought out the 15th edition, edited by- Peter Roach and James Hartman. The dictionary is a pronouncing glossary that lists words and names in Roman letters followed by their equivalents (with variants, where appropriate) in a phonemic transcription that uses the International Phonetic Alphabet to represent RECEIVED PRONUNCIATION (in 1997, BBC Pronunciation) as a pronunciation model. There is an account in the introduction of the model and the notation. The 14th edition contains over 59,664 items, while the 15th has over 80,000.

**OXFORD ENGLISH.**

1. English spoken with an OXFORD ACCENT, widely considered, especially in the earlier 20c, to be ‘the best’ BrE usage, but also regarded by many as affected and pretentious.

2. A term used by Oxford University Press in recent years virtually as a trade name in the promotion of English-language reference books and ELT course materials. It occurs in the title of Oxford English: A Guide to the Language, ed. I. C. B. Dear (1983). This work is presented as ‘a guide to correct written and spoken English and an accessible introduction to the language in all its aspects’. See BBC ENGLISH], CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH, RECEIVED PRONUNCIATION [12:16].

KING'S ENGLISH, The. A usage manual published in 1906 by the brothers Henry W. FOWLER and Francis G. Fowler. It was aimed at writers who ‘seldom look 7
into a grammar or composition book’. TKE contain articles on VOCABULARY (concrete versus abstract words, MALA PROP!SMS, LOANWORDS, SLANG, etc.), SYNTAX (relative pronouns, gerunds, shall/will, prepositions, etc.), what the Fowlers call 'Airs and Graces’ (ARCHAISM, elegant variation, INVERSION, METAPHOR, etc.), PUNCTUATION, EUPHONY, QUOTATIONS and misquotations, MEANING, AMBIGUITY, and STYLE. Most sections are supported by illustrative examples drawn from unfabricated sources, in particular from unspecified 19c works by Meredith, Thackeray, George Eliot, and others, and from Victorian or Edwardian issues of The Times, The Daily Telegraph, and The Guernsey Evening Press.

**Main part. Received Pronunciation Phonology The Vowel Sounds of RP**

The table below lists all the vowel sounds in an RP accent according to **lexical** set.

The phonetician John Wells introduced in his book, Accents of English 110:52], the concept of using a single word to refer to the pronunciation of a particular group of English words. He calls these word-groups lexical sets and uses a key word, such as *KIT*, to identify them.

**Vowel variations**

Vowels are far more useful than consonants when comparing regional accents. Every English accent can be compared to RP, or indeed to any other accent, by establishing the type of vowel used for any given set. For example, people from outside the North East find it difficult to distinguish between speakers on Teesside and speakers on Tyneside, but there are a number of crucial differences, most noticeably perhaps the pronunciation of words in the *NURSE* set - words such as *bird*, *work*, *herd*, *church* and *earn*, and *STAR'!'* and *PALM* sets - words such as *car*, *sharp* and *large* or *half, father* and drama. It is easier to distinguish between someone from Tyneside and an RP speaker, because the number of lexical sets for which different
vowel sounds are used by each group is far greater. Use the right-hand column and return to the home map to hear recordings of speakers who use different vowels in certain sets.

**Receive pronunciation: a Social Accent of English**

**Received Pronunciation,** or **RP** for short, is the instantly recognisable accent often described as 'typically British'. Popular terms for this accent, such as 'The Queen's English', 'Oxford English' or 'BBC English' are all a little misleading. The Queen, for instance, speaks an almost unique form of English, while the English we hear at Oxford University or on the BBC is no longer restricted to one type of **accent.**

RP is an **accent,** not a **dialect,** since all RP speakers speak Standard English. In other words, they avoid non-standard grammatical constructions and localised vocabulary characteristic of regional dialects. RP is also regionally non-specific, that is it does not contain any clues about a speaker's geographic background. But it does reveal a great deal about their social and/or educational background.

**Well-known but not widely used**

RP is probably the most widely studied and most frequently described variety of spoken English in the world, yet recent estimates suggest only *2%* of the UK population speak it. It has a negligible presence in Scotland and Northern Ireland and is arguably losing its prestige status in Wales. It should properly, therefore, be described as an English, rather than a British accent. As well as being a living accent, RP is also a theoretical linguistic concept. It is the accent on which phonemic transcriptions in dictionaries are based, and it is widely used (in competition with **General American)** for teaching English as a foreign language. RP is included here as a case study, not to imply it has greater merit than any other English accent, but because it provides us with an extremely familiar model against which comparisons with other accents may be made.

RP is a young accent in linguistic terms. It was not around, for example, when Dr Johnson wrote *A Dictionary of the English Language* in 1757. He chose not to include pronunciation suggestions as he felt there was little agreement even within educated society regarding 'recommended' forms. The phrase Received Pronunciation was coined in 1869 by the linguist, A J Ellis, but it only became a widely used term used to describe the accent of the social elite after the phonetician, Daniel Jones, adopted it for the second edition of the *English Pronouncing Dictionary*> (1924). The definition of 'received' conveys its original meaning of 'accepted' or 'approved' — as in 'received wisdom'. We can trace the origins of RP back to the public schools and universities of nineteenth-century Britain indeed Daniel Jones initially used the term **Public School Pronunciation** to describe this emerging, socially exclusive accent. Over the course of that century, members of the ruling and privileged classes increasingly attended boarding schools such as Winchester, Eton, Harrow and Rugby and graduated from the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Their speech patterns - based loosely on the local accent of the south-east Midlands (roughly London, Oxford and Cambridge) — soon came to be associated with 'The Establishment' and therefore gained a unique status, particularly within the middle classes in London.

**Broadcaster's choicc**

RP probably received its greatest impetus, however, when Lord Reith, the first General Manager of the BBC, adopted it in 1922 as a broadcasting standard - hence the origins of the term **BBC English.** Reith believed Standard English, spoken with an RP accent, would be the most widely understood variety of English, both here in the UK and overseas. I le was also conscious that choosing a regional accent might run the risk of alienating some listeners. To a certain extent Reith's decision was understandable, and his attitude only reflected the social climate at the time. But since RP was the preserve of the aristocracy and expensive public schools, it represented only a very small social minority. This policy prevailed at the BBC for a considerable time and probably contributed to the sometimes negative perception of regional varieties of English.

**There's more than one RP**

A speaker who uses numerous very localised pronunciations is often described as having a 'broad' or 'strong[7] regional accent, while terms such as [fc]mild' or 'soft' are applied to speakers whose speech patterns are only subtly different from RP speakers. So, we might describe one speaker as having a broad Glaswegian accent and another as having a mild Scottish accent. Such terms are inadequate when applied to Received Pronunciation, although as with any variety of English, RP encompasses a wide variety of speakers and should not be confused with the notion of 'posh[1] speech. The various forms of RP can be roughly divided into three categories. **Conservative RP** refers to a very traditional variety particularly associated with older speakers and the aristocracy. **Mainstream RP** describes an accent that we might consider extremely neutral in terms of signals regarding age, occupation or lifestyle of the speaker. **Contemporary RP** refers to speakers using features typical of younger RP speakers. All,' however, are united by the fact they do not use any pronunciation patterns that allow us to make assumptions about where they are from in the UK.

**RP today**

Like any other accent, RP has also changed over the course of time. The voices we associate with early BBC broadcasts, for instance, now sound extremely old- fashioned to most. Just as RP is constantly evolving, so our attitudes towards the accent are

changing. For much of the twentieth century, RP represented the voice of education, authority, social status and economic power. The period immediately after the Second World War was a time when educational and social advancement suddenly became a possibility for many more people. Those who were able to take advantage of these opportunities — be it in terms of education or career — often felt under considerable pressure to conform linguistically and thus adopt the accent of the establishment or at least modify their speech towards RP norms. In recent years, however, as a result of continued social change, virtually every accent is represented in all walks of life to which people aspire — sport, the arts, the media, business, even former strongholds of RP Kngland, such as the City, Civil Service and academia. As a result, fewer younger speakers with regional accents consider it necessary to adapt their speech to the same extent. Indeed many commentators even suggest that younger RP speakers often go to great lengths to disguise their middle-class accent by incorporating regional features into their speech.

First, then, lets us consider some issues relating to how we define RP. What criteria can we use?

• The first possible criterion is sociolinguistic. If RP is associated with the upper end of the social scale, we can observe and investigate what kind of pronunciation the upper class actually uses. The royal family furnishes the most easily observed set of subjects, samples of whose speech is often available on television. Beyond this special and sometimes idiosyncratic group, the question ‘ arises how far down the social scale we should come in attempting to circumscribe RP. The proportion of the population regarded as upper-class is extremely small, and we clearly need to consider the upper-middle classes as well. Having defined our social group, our phonetic description would then be purely factual. —In former times the label ’"educated people" might have been used to identify RP-spcakers; but demographic changes, particularly over the last forty years, mean that it is no longer the case that all or even most educated people in England speak RP as traditionally described. When 1 myself was an undergraduate, the proportion of my age-group that went to study at university was 7%. Among today’s teenagers it is over 35%.

• A second criterion is ideal. We ask what pronunciation is correct. What is beautiful, what is admired and imitated? Another variant of this approach characterizes the selected accent as widely accepted, or as widely understood.

This type of criterion cannot be taken at face value. There is no way of determining what pronunciation is correct other than by asking what people regard as correct. Judgments of beauty are subjective. It would be difficult to demonstrate that RP, although admittedly non-local izable, is truly more readily understood in modern Britain than educated Scottish, Irish, London-flavored or Manchester-![avored speech.

• The third criterion relates specifically to EFL teaching. What form of pronunciation do we teach our (British-English-oriented) learners? What do we record in dictionaries and textbooks? What model pronunciation do we supply on recorded audio tapes and videos? (Agreed, we need to expose learners to a wide range of different accents for practice in comprehension. The point is, what model do we set before them for imitation?) A great achievement of my illustrious predecessor as Professor of Phonetics at UCL, Daniel Jones, was his codification of RP for teaching purposes. Out of a mass of variability he distilled a coherent model that could be taught and learned. However Jones was born in 1881. I lis model of RP, based essentially on his own pronunciation, is 'already over a century old. Jonesian RP is unquestionably obsolete: no-one pronounces quite like that nowadays. If we are to continue to prescribe RP as the model for EFL, as 1 believe we should — whether we continue to call it that or give it some other name — then we clearly have to redefine it so as to reflect the changes that have taken placc in the decades that have passed since Jones's formulation.

The choice of defining criterion may have consequences for what we consider the phonetics of RP to be. Here are three points on which we might have different views according to which criterion we adopt.

• **Smoothing.** This is the process whereby a diphthong may lose its second element when followed by another vowel. Thus for example *fire* Mai 3/ may be smoothed to [fao]. Similarly, *science* /Hsalsns/ may be realized as [sasns], *power* /pauo/ as [pao], *Howard* Mia U ad/ as [hasdj, and *throwing* /BOroUIij/ as [0r3lijJ. Now

sociolinguistically this is clearly part of RP, since it is frequently to be observed in the speech of those native speakers in England who are located towards the upper end of the social scale. From the ideal point of view, on the other hand, it is not part of RP: one cannot imagine a school teacher correcting a child who failed to apply smoothing in his pronunciation. For EFL, it is in my view something that the learner should be aware of (so that he knows that [saons] is to be interpreted as *science*); but it is not something that needs to be imitated in the learner's own speech production.

• **R Intrusion.** Ordinary linking /r/ is the final consonant sound that comes and goes, appearing when a word is followed by a vowel sound in the next word. It corresponds to a letter *r* in the spelling: for example *better* /Hlbete/, but *better off* /0betor @Df/. By analogy speakers of all social classes in almost all parts of England add an /r/-sound under the same circumstances even where there is no letter *r* in the spelling, as for example *comma* /HkDms/, but *put a comma in* ZfDpUt 0 0k Dm or in/. Just as *fear* /fio/ gives *fear of* Mi or 0 v/ *doing something*, so *idea* /aiHldlo/ gives *the idea of* /al0dlor ov/ *doing something*. Objectively, therefore, intrusive *!x!* is part of RP. Subjectively, though, the speech-conscious often dislike it and disapprove of it, perhaps on the grounds that it involves "pronouncing a letter that isn't there". They would exclude it from their ideal pronunciation model. For EFL we might again agree that the learner should be aware of it receptively, but can ignore it in production.

• **Words spelt** *wh*. In words spelt with wh English people of all social classes and in all parts of the country normally pronounce plain /w/, as *why*
Aval/, *when* /wen/, *which* /witj/, *somewhere* /BsAmwcs/. The words *whine* and *wine* are homophones. However a few speech-conscious people make the effort to pronounce /hw/ in these words, thus /hwal, hwen, hwltj, BsAmhwea/, and to make a distinction between /hwain/ and /wain/. (In Scotland, Ireland, and much of the United States, matters are different: their native local accent retains /hw/.) Sociolinguistically, /hw/ is so uncommon as to be negligible; ideally, it should perhaps be regarded as part of RP. For EFL, Jones rightly judged that it was an unnecessary comp I i cation.

Let us turn now to the time dimension, and consider the changes that on any reckoning have affected RP since Jones's day. We can group them in three

chronological categories: those of the early twentieth century, those of the mid-century, and those of the late twentieth century. Subjectively , they represent those changes that happened before learning native English; those where the contemporaries fluctuate, have variable usage (perhaps stylistically conditioned), or are divided; and those which have come about since old days and do not form part of own speech.

**Changes from the early twentieth century**

1. **Transfer of the CLOTH set.** In Jones's time, and until around the time of the second world war, words belonging to the standard lexical set CLOTH (Wells 1982) were usually pronounced with the vowel *h* 1/ (as in *thought*); but nowadays they are pronounced with *fx>!* (as in *lot).* Examples include *cough, soft, cross, lost* — words in which the vowel is followed by a voiceless fricative.

2. **Merger of /3o/ and /D □/.** There used to be a distinction in pronunciation in pairs such as *floor* /ftoo/ vs. *flaw* /fbl /. Even Jones recognized that some speakers in his time pronounced *hUf* in words where he had /z>o/, and by now the distinction is obsolete. In contemporary RP *floor* and *flaw* are homophones, as are *four* and *for*, *cores* and *cause*, *shore* and *Shaw.*

3. **Change in the quality of the GOAT vowel.** My predecessor Gimson's decision (1962) to change the transcription of this diphthong from /o*uf* to *huf* reflected the change that had taken place in pronunciation. In *over the road* /Souvo 60 ffiroud/, / *don t know* /ai Hldount Izlnsu/ we now use a diphthong with a mid-central, usually unrounded starting point. A century ago the starting point was back and rounded. A side effect of this change is that the corresponding weakened vowel, written by Jones as [0], thus *November* /nolUvembo/, has now become an ordinary /o/, thus /nslEvembo/. If we keep the first vowel strong in *profound* we have /proulzlfaund/; if, as is more usual, we weaken it, we get /pro^faund/.

4. **Opening of** /a;/. Listening to old film clips or recordings we arc often struck by the quality of the vowel /ae/ previously to be heard, as in *that had man* /@6ast Utod @m<cn/. It was not only considerably less open than is now customary, but was also tenser and had more pharyngeal constriction. Currently this vowel is more relaxed and may be quite similar to cardinal 4 [a].

5. **Loss of tapped** *IvL* A further change from this period was the loss of the alveolar lap [f] as a usual realization of *hi* between vowels, as in *very sorry, belter off.* It has been replaced by the ordinary approximant [J],

**Changes in the mid twentieth century**

6. **Decline and disappearance of** /Ua/. Words formerly containing the diphthong /Uo/ have come increasingly to be pronounced with /3l 7 instead. Thus jws/r is no longer /juo/ but /pCJ/. *Poor, sure, moor, cure, tourist* are often /pDC, JbD, no I , kjD J, latDUrlst/. My survey figures for *poor* showed that when we group all ages together /pD I/ was preferred over the traditional /pus/ by a margin of 57% to 43% of the respondents; but when we look at different

age-groups separately /p3 1/ was preferred by only 27% of the oldest respondents (bom before 1923) as against a massive 81% of the youngest (born since 1962). Words such as *jury, rural* seem generally to be resistant to this change, and do not rhyme with *story, choral* Rather, they seem now typically to be pronounced with a monophthong of the fuD) type, perhaps to be interpreted as a variant of /ul /.

7. **Drift from weak** *111* **to** *hi.* In various categories of weak syllables *hi* is increasingly used where *III* formerly prevailed. Thus *possible* is now usually /SpDssbl/ rather than, as previously, /l?JpDsibl/. For *private* and *carelessness* my father said /Elpralvlt, l?]keollsnIs/, but 1 say /felpralvot, Bkeolosnos/. While both variants are still to be heard in these endings *-ible, -ate, -less, -ness,* and likewise in *-ity, -ily,* the balance of preference has, in my judgement, swung from *III* to *hi.* Where weak *III* was word-final, as in *visibility,* once /0vlzl(2blllltl/, now /0vlzdEblloti/, a different change is taking place, as discussed below.

8. **Plosive epentlicsis.** Between a nasal and a voiceless fricative, in words such as *fence* /fens/, *answer* /l?Ja I nso/, speakers increasingly now insert a plosive, thus /fents, l2la I ntso/. This development appears to have a physiological origin, since it can be demonstrated to result from a slight adjustment in the relative timing of the movements of the soft palate and the primary articulator (the tongue tip). The result is that pairs such as *mince* and *mints* have become homophonous, /mints/. Other examples, shown here with the epenthesi/ed consonant in italics, are *emphasis*

/Sempfosls/, *instance* /Blnteton/s/ and *conscience* /(HkDn/Jan/s/.

9. **Yod coalescence.** English has long had a tendency to convert /tj/ into /tJV, /dj/ into /d3/. We see this in the history of words such as *nature*, where the earlier /t/ plus /j/ has long ago been replaced by an affricate, /UlneltJV. During the course of the twentieth century this process has continued apace. Jones pronounced *actual* as /Lacktjusl/, a variant that nowadays would be perceived as mannered or indeed artificial: we say /Uaektjugl, Dscktfl, □sektjo/. For me, *perpetual* and *to graduate* have formal, extremely careful forms /pol Ipetjuol, Igraedjuelt/, but everyday forms /ponpetjual, I graed3ueit/. These arc all words, you will notice, in which the new affricate is followed by a weak (unstressed) vowel. Further discussion follows below.

10. **T glottalling.** In various environments the consonant /t/ tends to be pronounced as a glottal plosive, [?J, rather than as the traditional alveolar [tj. This is by now normal before a following obstruent consonant in a different syllable or word, as in *football* [I Ifu?b3 : Ij, *quite good* [LUkwai? IgodJ. It is ' also frequent before a sonorant consonant in the same environment, as in *witness* [ lwl?nos], *atlas* [Darios], *network* f[]ne?w3 : k], *quite wrong*

[ Jkwal? GrDijJ. London's second airport, *Gatwick*, for me has a careful variant [□gaetwlk] and a casual variant [Dgas?wlk].

**Changes in the late twentieth century**

The developments that have arisen in the last two decades or so are associated also with the rise of what has been dubbed Estuary English a term coined by Rosewarne, 1984, after the Thames estuary, and implying influence of the southeastern part of England centered on London. From the phonetic point of view, Estuary English is supposed to comprise the middle ground between traditional RP on the one hand and Cockney (London working-class speech) on the other. It is best seen as a variety of Standard English, though spoken with a regional accent, just as Standard English may be expressed in a northern or Scottish or Irish accent. But since London is, as ever, the main source of new fashions, in pronunciation as in everything else, many of the characteristics of Estuary English are being, or are likely to be, gradually incorporated into RP. Estuary English is well described in the popular though well-informed book

*Do you .speak. Estuary?* (Goggle 1993)[1:42], with its subtitle 'The new Standard English- how to spot it and speak it'.

11. **Tensing of** final **and prevocalic /I**/. The final vowel in words

such *happy, coffee, valley* was traditionally identified with the *III* of *bit.* But many speakers nowadays identify it with the /i : / of *beat.* In many recent works (e.g. Wells 1990, Roach 1991) the phonetic symbol /i/ is used, to denote this variable or intermediate quality, thus /Gha^pi, Dkofi, IJvseli/. This notation reflects the fact that there is no actual opposition between *III* and /i : / in these weak syllables *(happy* does not become a different word by switching from one ' vowel to the other); what has happened is a change in the preferred phonetic quality of the weak vowel. If our phonological theory is sufficiently sophisticated to recognize a distinction between a strong vowel system (used typically but not exclusively in stressed syllables) and a weak vowel system (used only in unstressed syllables), then we can place /i/ in the weak system. It is used not only word-finally, but also before a vowel as in *happier* / Ihsepio/, *various* /1 vesriss/, *radiate /[* reldieit/.

12. **Rise of the diphthong** [DO]. Increasingly in RP words such as *fold, goal* are said with a back rounded diphthong with a starting point comparable to the | *D* \ of *lot.* This diphthong is found only before dark /I/, [+], or the vowel that develops from it (see below). Speakers who do this are often quite conscious of the difference between their [DO] and ordinary [su].

Through a process of morphological regularization, they may extend this to words where /l/ is morpheme-final but followed by a vowel, yielding occasional

minimal pairs such as *wholly 1*1 IhDUli/ vs. *holy/UhauW!.*

13. Change in the quality of /u : , u/. Traditionally classified as back and rounded, these vowels are not only losing their lip-rounding but also ceasing to be very back. I'hus *spoon,* conservatively [spu : n], may now range

to a loosely rounded [sputtnj or even [spltn], while *good* /gud/ is often pronounced with a schwa-like quality.

14. **T** glottal ling. The environments for the glottal stop replacing [tj now extend to word-final position even when the next word does not begin with a vowel, as in

*quite easy* [Hkwai? di : zi], *take it off[* 1 teik I? □ DfJ, *not only* | Jno? Ilounli], or absolute-final (prepausal) *right* [ral?]. Intervocalically within a word, as in *city, water*, glottal stops are still regarded as Cockney: [r_sl?i, JwD : ?o] belong neither to EE nor, of course, to RP.

15. **L** vocalization. RP is traditionally described as having two main allophones of/l/: clear [1] used before a vowel and dark f+| used elsewhere. It is the dark allophone that is now undergoing a process of vocalization (becoming a vowel): + —> o. Thus in a word such as *milk,* traditionally [ml+kj, the tongue tip may nowadays make no contact at all with the alveolar ridge: instead we have a new kind of* diphthong, [mlok]. Similarly *shelf* becomes [Jeof], *tables*
[□telboz], *apple* [J £epo]. The position where this development is most favoured is adjacent to a labial, as in the latter examples; but it is no longer restricted to this position. When it applies lo cases such as *middle, little* a natural consequence is that the lateral release found in conservative speech (f lmld+, 1 Iit+j) is replaced by an ordinary median release, [Limldo, Cllto].

16. **Yod coalescence** continues to widen its scope, extending now to stressed syllables. This makes *Tuesday*, conservatively /Dtju : z-/, begin /ntju • /-/, identical with *choose* /tju : z/. *Tune* and *duke* become /tju : n, d3u ' k/, and *reduce* comes to have a second syllable identical with *juice.* I like to think of the avoidance of this development as a touchstone of RP (as against EE, which clearly accepts it); but I am not sure that this claim can really be maintained.

One further development that perhaps deserves mention is the rise of so-called **uptalk** or **upspcak,** the use of a rising nuclear tone on a statement, where a fall might be expected. The (presumably unintended) effect may be one of reluctance to commit oneself or of diffidence. This use of the rise may well have started in Australia or California, but is observably spreading to Britain.

**Specific lexical items**

The changes we have been discussing up to this point have all been general ones, applying in an environment that can be specified phonetically. There are other changes, though, that are lexically specific: they involve just a single word that has changed its

shape. Thus for example *nephew*, which at the beginning of the century was usually /1 nevju : /, is now mostly pronounced /Dnefju ' /. This is not part of a general trend affecting /v/ between vowels, but something affecting just this word.

My data comes from the survey of pronunciation preferences that I carried out for the Longman Pronunciation Dictionary (Wells 1990). In the dictionary 1 reported the polling results relating to close on a hundred words in which speakers were known to disagree about the pronunciation. These results were pooled for all respondents. What I have done now is to analyse the results by respondent's age. In some cases this reveals no difference at all between the old and the young: for example, in *chrysanthemum* the pronunciation with *Is/* is preferred over the form with /z/ by a margin of approximately 60% to 40% by all age groups. In other cases there is sharp age grading, such that one can see a clear trend as a newer pronunciation, preferred by the young, comes to predominate over an older form.

Thus in *nephew* the /f/ form, preferred by 79% of all respondents, proves to be the choice of a mere 51% of those respondents born before 1923, but of as many as 92% of those born since 1962. There is a clear trend line, showing that the *N!* form (which happens to be the one I prefer myself) is due to disappear entirely before very long.

Similarly, the percentage preferring /su * 1/ over /sju : t/ in *suit* has risen from 47% among the oldest group to 92% among the youngest. In *deity* /*Bdel-f* (as against /I Idi : -/) has risen from 40% to 98%, In *zebra* /□ zebra/ is preferred over / Uzi : bro/ by 65% rising to 96%. In *applicable* stress on the second syllable is preferred over initial stress by 59% of the oldest, but by 91% of the youngest. In *primarily*, antepenultimate stress (/pralfllmeroli/ and the like) is preferred over initial stress (/□praimoroli/) by 51% of the oldest but 77% of the youngest.

## Conclusion

EFL teachers working within a British English-oriented environment should continue to use RP (though not necessarily under that name) as their pronunciation model. But this model must be revised and updated from time to time.

*9S*

Received pronounciation is often taken to have existed for a relatively long time, evolving from a prestigious accent well established in England by the 17c, when comparisons began to be made between the speech of the court and the nobility in London and that of their peers from the provinces. John Aubrey provides a hearsay report that Sir Walter Raleigh had a Devon accent; Samuel Johnson in the 18c is on record as speaking with a Staffordshire accent. Although there was an increasingly homogeneous and fashinable style of speech in the capitalin the 18-19c, little is known about it. It probably served in part at least as a model for the middel classes and may have'been common at such ancient public schools as Eton, Harrow, Rugby, and Winchester, but there is no evidence that a uniform accent was used or promoted in these schools untill the later 19c. However,by beginning of the 20c, it was well established, and in 1917, at the height of the First World War, Jones defined his model for English as that 'most usually heard in everyday speech in the families of Southern english persons whose menfolk have been educated at the great public boarding-school', and called il public School Pronounciation.

Many British people dislike Received Pronounciation, usually arguing that it is a mark of privilege and of social domination by the English. It has, however, a considerable gravitational pull throughout the UK, wih the result that many middlc- and lower middle-class people, especially in England, speak with accents more or less adapted towads it. These accents are therefore known among phoneticians as modified regional accents and modified RP.

Like any other accent, RP has also changed over the course of time. The voices we associate with early BBC broadcasts, for instance, now' sound extremely old-

fashioned to most. Just as RP is constantly evolving, so our attitudes towards the accent are changing. For much of the twentieth century, RP represented the voice of education, authority, social status and economic power. The period immediately after the Second World War was a time when educational and social advancement suddenly became a possibility for many more people.

It is difficult to say that received pronounciation is understandable for everyone, but it meance that we will try to understand it.


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